Prevention, Management, and Surveillance of Exertional Heat Illness (FY02-2057)

Impact

A model Heat Injury Prevention Program developed out of this initiative was endorsed by The Office of The Surgeon General (OTSG) for implementation at all Major Subordinate Commands. Guidelines for management of exertional heat illness (EHI) were also developed and approved (MEDCEN Memorandum 40-51) which standardized medical treatment, reporting, follow-up, and Medical Evaluation Board (MEB) referral and profiling for EHI cases at the installation.

Description

This installation experienced an increasing number of heat casualties (168 in 2000, 203 in 2001) and an increasing number with serious injury (47 hospitalized in 2000, 79 in 2001). Specific activities such as Expert Field Medical Badge (EFMB), Expert Infantryman Badge (EIB), large scale runs, and ruckmarches were identified as high-risk events. The purpose of this initiative was to monitor heat illness surveillance, standardize medical treatment and medical disposition, and Line Commanders with appropriate training methods to prevent EHI in their Soldiers.

Outcomes

A Heat Injury Prevention Program was established and endorsed by OTSG. This program was developed to improve heat injury prevention and surveillance. The program was able to demonstrate stabilization in number of heat injuries and heat casualties. In addition to the activities on the installation level, the US Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine (USACHPPM) produced new training guides and training aids for heat injury prevention. USACHPPM also produced a new training video, Health Injury Risk Management, which is suitable for all levels of providers as well as line and cadre. Training materials and the video are available at http://chppm-www.apgea.army.mil/heat/.

Innovative Features

This initiative involved both Line and Medical leadership in a common effort to reduce EHI. It used technology in the form of monitored Web Bulb Globe Thermometers and lap top computers to keep remote sites informed of hazardous weather conditions.

Lessons Learned

- Since this was a large, multi-year project that involved a substantial amount of time and effort, strong leadership was essential to keep the project moving along.
- A high-level of commitment from installation leadership was also necessary to bring the program to the attention of the OTSG.